

Last month, I introduced the [One America, Many Voices Act of 2010](#) , which recognizes the importance of multi-lingual skills in America's federal workforce. The One America, Many Voices Act provides a 5% incentive to the base pay of Federal employees whose position requires the use of bi- or multi-lingual skills, but who currently receive the same pay as workers in the same job without the same skill requirement. There are two critical reasons for doing so.

First, instituting a standard for bilingual pay for federal employees brings the federal government up to par with over two decades of human resource policies of local and state governments and the private sector that were implemented to retain and compensate staff whose jobs require an ongoing fluency of a foreign language. Currently, there is no standard across federal agencies to compensate workers who make substantial use of their bilingual skills in the workplace, and no incentive for current or potential Federal employees to acquire bilingual skills.

Second, in America's ongoing security-related efforts to build positive relationships in conflict zones around the world, we need professionals who possess a high level of fluency in languages that are critical to our national security such as Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, Russian, Hindi and others. Years after the 9/11 Commission's recommendation to increase the capacity of bilingual operatives and analysts and years after President Bush issued a mandate for the CIA to increase its bilingual workforce by 50 percent, our country still lacks these skills. The One America, Many Voices Act provides much needed leadership, standardization and consistency throughout federal agencies, thus strengthening our national security apparatus.

It is my hope that we recognize our country's increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity as an asset, not a threat. Many voices make us more versatile in a globalized economy, more able to deal with national security concerns, and more effective in delivering government services. It is high time we recognize this in the federal government.

